

VZCZCXRO6475
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK RUEHMOS
DE RUEHGB #0262/01 0301641
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 301641Z JAN 06
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2376
INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000262

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/27/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [KWMN](#)
SUBJECT: SADR CITY WOMEN COMPLAIN OF POLITICAL AND LEGAL
LIMITATIONS; FEAR FUTURE OF "DARKNESS"

REF: BAGHDAD 3382

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD FOR
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a January 22 meeting with PolOff, three Sadr City women complained about the challenges women face living in Sadr City, including a serious erosion in their legal rights. The women said that it is difficult for women to be politically active in Sadr City because they cannot engage in politics or even have meetings without the approval of their husbands, or, in the case of single women, a male family member. They noted that the Shia Islamist parties that dominate Sadr City politics have not put forth many women candidates. Women who somehow "offend" public sensibilities can find themselves in an illegal Sharia court, while others can suffer an "honor killing." END SUMMARY.

The Limits on Political Women

¶2. (C) Poloff met January 22 with a group of Sadr City women including Soad al Lami, a Sadr City District Advisory Council (DAC) member and lawyer, as well as a recent Jaysh al Mahdi (JAM) kidnap victim, Nadam Hafidh, an administrative assistant at the Sadr City General Information Center (GIC), and Amal Kabashi, a middle school biology teacher. The group said that while there are Sadr City women who could become political leaders, they remain invisible because of pressures/constraints. They said that due to community pressures, women cannot hold meetings without the approval of their husbands, or, in the case of single women, the permission of a male family member. The only way for women to engage in elected politics is through one of Iraq's political parties, which tend to be male-dominated.

¶3. (C) The group said that the Shia Islamist parties that dominate Sadr City politics often have chauvinistic agendas. Women who try to be too independent are kicked out of the parties. The group noted that while the new constitution establishes a goal that no less than 25% of the seats in the Council of Representatives (COR) are to be held by women, it makes no mention of provincial or local governing bodies. When asked about the future of political women in Sadr City, Nadam predicted "darkness."

¶4. (C) Soad told PolOff that politically active women can be in great danger, telling how members of JAM kidnapped her while she was putting up political posters in advance of the December 15 elections. She was blindfolded and held for several hours because JAM did not approve of her actions. At the time of the interview she was still shaken by the events, and was reluctant to discuss the matter in

detail.

Sharia Courts and Honor Killings

15. (C) The three women also asserted to PolOff that there were illegal sharia courts operating in Sadr City. These courts allegedly operate in secret locations and prosecute people for such "crimes" as drinking alcohol in the privacy of their own homes. The courts also sometimes prosecute women for adultery, not covering their heads, and talking to men. The women reported to PolOff that these "courts" hear cases based on rumor and hearsay. Women accused of immoral conduct can be sentenced to death by beating or be banned from the community. (NOTE: Other contacts in Sadr City have told us about similar "courts" as well. END NOTE.) The group also told Poloff that women face discrimination in legitimate courts, e.g. in child custody cases.

16. (C) Poloff asked the women about the frequency of so-called "honor killings" - the practice of killing a woman who has stained her family's honor. They replied that such murders do occur in Sadr City, but have been on the decline since the 1990s. Soad, who practices family law, lamented that these crimes are to some degree sanctioned by Iraqi law. She told PolOff that the maximum penalty for a man who kills his wife or sister in an honor killing is three years in prison.

17. (C) Honor killings can be incited by rumors and hearsay, according to these women. Consequently, women strive to protect their reputations by avoiding public contacts with

BAGHDAD 00000262 002 OF 002

unrelated men. Nadam told PolOff that her cousin was killed simply because a man dialed her cell phone number by accident. For women in Sadr City, receiving a wrong number can lead to death. The women also reported that sometimes husbands kill wives based on the often erroneous belief that their wives were not virgins at the time they were married. (reftel).

Comment

18. (C) PolOff was struck by the openness and frankness with which these women spoke about these topics. These women expressed the view that Iraq was at a critical juncture in its history, and women are losing out. While these women dressed as conservative Muslims - they all wore the hijab - they appeared equally concerned about having their voices heard in the new Iraq. As Islamic parties increasingly dominate Sadr City politics and squeeze out independent candidates, the women feared that they will find it increasingly difficult to be politically active.
KHALILZAD